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ABSTRACT

Previous interpretations of male/female discourse were examined in light of new data generated from a study of intercultural mixed-sex dyads. Eleven dyads, each consisting of a Chinese and an American subject, were videotaped in 30-minute conversations about courtship in different cultures. The tapes were content analyzed to obtain information on amount of time spent talking by members of each sex and culture group, number of informative questions asked by members of sex and group, number of interruptions, and number of tag questions used. In addition, 26 American subjects rated each dyad member on measures of dominance, expertness, linguistic skill, attractiveness, helpfulness, and apprehensiveness. The results showed that the percentage of time spent talking per dyad was significantly related to sex, with males talking more than females; however, the average length of talk was found not to be significantly correlated with sex. The percentage of time talked per dyad was not found to be related significantly to perceived dominance, but the average length of talk was correlated significantly with dominance. The findings suggest that stereotypes of the "submissive" female and the "aggressive" male may not hold true in intercultural interactions. (Author/FL)

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Sex Differences In Intercultural Discourse: An Empirical Analysis

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Sex Differences In Intercultural Discourse:
An Empirical Analysis

In recent years, the study of sex role differences has become an increasingly popular topic in the literature of the social sciences.[1] The reasons for this probably include the importance of such research for a wide variety of practical social problems. Indeed, research on sex differences has important implications for our understanding of social roles, power relationships, family communication and interpersonal attraction. But the study of sex differences also has important implications for the study of society and culture. As society changes and as social roles change, the importance of the study of sex roles becomes more pronounced. As females and males begin to take on new or different roles within a given culture, social rules may be reordered in ways which have implications for a wide variety of human behaviors.

In communication studies, as in other social sciences, the focus on sex differences has generated some new findings important to the development of comprehensive theories of communication. Of special interest in our report, are those studies which focus on communication strategies employed by members of different sexes. Some research, for example, indicates that females may be more likely than males to utilize

subtle, indirect compliance-gaining strategies.[2] This finding, in part, may be due to the subordinate position of the female in American culture. While this result has not always been found in the research,[3] the theoretical importance of such research is enormous. If members of a culture who play subordinate roles are compelled to develop subtle communication strategies in order to cope effectively with their environment, it is those members of the culture whose communicative performance may resemble most closely their underlying communicative competence.[4] That is, the female communicator must compensate for her subordinate position by utilizing strategies in ordinary discourse that males are not motivated to use. As a result, the communicative behaviors of females may represent more general communicative <u>abilities</u> than the communicative behaviors of males. It is in this sense that we see the female as a unique component for study in communication research. Scrutiny of female discourse in a variety of research contests may help to provide unique insight into the communicative abilities of all normal humans.

In this paper we report the results of some research which was done in an intercultural context. While the main thrust of that research focused in some different research questions,[5] serendipitous findings[6] were uncovered which, we believe, have important implications for theory and further research on male/female discourse. Before examining those

results, however, it is necessary to review some of the most consistent findings in the study of sex and discourse. these findings pertain to the amount of talk by members of different sexes, the number of interrogatives used by members of different sexes, and the number of interruptions by members of different sexes. All of these variables have been assumed by researchers to be related to conversational dominance or control.

Amount of Talk

Perhaps the most consistent finding throughout the research on sex differences in human communication has been that males talk more than females. Eakins and Eakins report that in their exploratory study of discourse in seven faculty meetings the male faculty members spoke an average of 17.07 seconds in each speaking turn while females spoke an average of ten seconds per turn.[7] Wood found that males talked more than females whether they were communicating with females or with other males.[8] Swaeker found that when males and females were asked to describe paintings males talked significantly more than females.[9] Parker found that in a classroom setting males participated more than females.[10] Strodbeck and Mann discovered that in mock jury trials, the males, who constituted sixty-seven percent of the jury members, did eighty percent of the talking in the jury deliberations.[11] In their

review of this literature, Eakins and Eakins report no studies which found that females talked more than males.

Interruptions

Interruptions have been shown to be violations of ordinary turn-taking rules,[12] and are thought to be indirectors of assertiveness.[13] The classic studies on interruptions were done by Zimmerman and West.[14] These researchers first recorded conversations in a variety of public places (all university settings) and found that males interrupted females more often than females interrupted males. In order to discover if interruptions would occur in initial encounters where norms of politeness may have more potential to take hold, Zimmerman and West conducted a follow-up investigation of interruptions in a laboratory setting with previously unacquainted strangers. Again, they found that males interrupted females more frequently than females interrupted males.

Questions

Lakoff, arguing from her own experience, noted several years ago that females utilize more "tag questions" than males do.[15] Since that time, researchers have not only confirmed this notion[16] but they also have shown that females use more interrogatives in general, than males do. Hirschmen's

studies of mixed sex dyads illustrate a pattern of females asking questions and males giving answers.[17] In a recent study of husband/wife interactions, Courtwright,Miller and Rodgers-Miller found that the wives asked more questions than husbands.[18] Since the authors found a negative correlation between question asking and "domineeringness" they imply that questioning is a submissive response. Lakoff also argued that using tag-questions as qualifiers reflected women's subordinate role in society, Eakins and Eakins suggested that questioning reflects the interpersonal sensitivity of females vis-a-vis males when they reported some of the findings on questioning behavior by males and females.[19]

Sex Differences In Intercultural Discourse

Our research, conducted over the past year, was designed to help resolve three theoretically discrete research problems pertaining to a) the relative role of stereotyping and immediate experience in person perception; b) the relationship between questioning and conversational control in intercultural discourse; and c) the discovery of source, message, and pereeptual characteristics which best account for intercultural communicative behavior. For this research, eleven mixed sex intercultural (American/Chinese) dyads were videotaped in thirty minute conversations on the topic "courtship behaviors in different cultures." Subjects were drawn from speech communication classes. Eight Chinese males and three Chinese

females participated along with eight American females and three American males. Two of the dyads (both consisting of Chinese males and American females) were discarded from most of the analyses because of audio-interference.[20] This left six Chinese male/American female dyads and three Chinese females/American male dyads in the analysis. In the process of analyzing the videotape we uncovered some findings for sex which we will report here.

The tapes were content-analyzed on a number of different dimensions including amount of talk, number of interruptions, and number of questions by members of each dyad. Table 1 summarizes the data on amount of time talked by culture and sex.

TABLE 1

BREAKDOWN OF AMOUNT OF TIME BY CULTURE AND SEX

Group	American Females	American Males	Chinese Females	Chinese Males
n	n=7	n=3	n=3	n=7
Talk-Time I (in seconds)	2,170	1,395	665	3,005
$\bar{X}$	310	465	288	429

When little difference was found in the amount of time talked between the two cultures, males in each culture talked

significantly more than females did. In fact, the ratio of talk between sexes in each culture was almost identical. Chinese males talked about 1.5 times as much as Chinese females, while American males talked about 1.5 times as much as American females. Moreover, the simple correlation between sex and percentage of talk per dyad was .80, a strong relationship even with a small sample size. These data suggest that males may generally talk more than females in both Chinese and American cultures. The results provide additional support for previous research on sex differences in amount of talk.

The investigation of interruptions in these dyads also is illuminating. Only four interruptions occurred in the eleven Chinese/American interactions which were taped (including the two with audio interference). These four interruptions were all by the same subject, a Chinese male.[21] There were no instances of "talk-overs"[22] in any of the conversations. While Zimmerman and West suggested that concern over politeness does not prevent violations in turn-taking rules, we believe that situational constraints which called for politeness operated in the rather formal context (a videotaped encounter with a member of a different sex and different culture) which we provided. Zimmerman and West also argued that they expected interruptions to occur in relationships where subjects differ in race but they had no data to support their hypothesis. Our data suggest that, at least in some contexts, differences in race or culture

may result in more appropriate communication as indicated by fewer violations in turn-taking rules.[23]

Table 2 illustrates the number of questions used by members of different culture/sex groups. Chinese females, on the average, asked 1.5 times as many questions as Chinese males asked. American females, on the average, asked 1.6 times as many questions as American males asked. No instances of the use of tag questions, so frequently discussed in the literature on sex differences, were observed in the analysis we conducted.

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF QUESTIONS BY SEX AND CULTURAL GROUP

Group	American Females	American Males	Chinese Females	Chinese Males
n	n=8	n=3	n=3	n=8
Questions	239	57	20	36
$\bar{X}$	29.9	19.0	6.7	4.5

While our results are consistent with previous findings that females ask more questions than males, questioning seems to be related more closely to culture than sex. The largest differences in number of questions asked were differences between the cultures rather than differences between the sex groups. Americans of both sexes asked more questions than

Chinese of either sex. In fact, Americans asked five times as many questions as Chinese asked.[24] The reason for this, we believe, is that questioning is a subtle and, perhaps subconscious linguistic device which is related highly to linguistic skill and conversational control.[25] The Americans, as members of the host culture, had greater skill in English than members of the other cultures and were also in a dominant position on their "home turf." Thus, they were able to use speech in ways that members of the other culture could not or would not do.[26]

While we report our analysis in more detail elsewhere, we believe that this work combined with previous work by Mishler,[27] suggests that questions are devices for controlling conversational discourse. This notion helps to clear up a discrepancy in previous writing about the use of questions in the literature on female/male communication. For example, in the beginning of Sex Differences in Human Communication, Eakins and Eakins suggest that questions might be indicators of social power. They note[28] that superiors engage in such speech acts as ordering, asking, interrogating, declaring, and interrupting while subordinates comply, acquiesce, reply, agree, and allow interruptions. Later, however, when they report research showing females ask more questions than males ask,[29] they suggest that this is because of greater interpersonal sensitivity on the part of the female. We believe

the use of questioning is a subtle strategy which allows a person to control the direction of the conversation. We found some direct evidence of this in our analysis[30] which showed a strong relationship between questioning and perseived dominance. While our results are different from the findings of Courtwright, Miller and Rodgers-Miller, it is worth noting that we examined initial interactions while Courtwright and his colleagues studied communication between intimates (wives and husbands). In initial interactions questions may function differently than in intimate interactions.[31]

In further analysis of the data we computed percentage of questions per dyad for each participant (number of questions asked by the participant/total number of questions asked in the dyad), percentage of new topics initiated in the dyad by each participant, average time talked per dyad for each particiapnt (speaking time for the participant/total speaking time in the dyad) and average length of talk. In addition, we obtained data on perceptions of expertise, attractiveness, helpfulness, dominance, and linguistic skill by asking twenty-six subjects from speech classes to rate members of each dyad on four measures of each dimension. This data was analyzed in several ways, including a multiple regression analysis using gender as a criterion variable.[32] Results of the analysis are summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3

SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION

WITH GENDER AS A CRITERION VARIABLE

VARIABLE*	MULTIPLE R	R. SQ.	R. SQ. CHANGE	SIMPLE R	B	BETA
Perceived Dominance	.19	.03	.03	.19	.47	.61
Percentage of Questions	.72	.51	.48	-.48	-.75	-.60
Percentage of Talk	.86	.75	.23	.80	1.58	.37
Average Length of Talk	.87	.75	.00	.33	-.36	-.22
Percentage of Topics Initiated	.88	.78	.03	.62	.58	.26
Perceived Expertness	.89	.79	.01	.16	-.40	-.20
Perceived Linguistic Skill	.89	.80	.00	-.50	-.24	-.38
Perceived Attractiveness	.90	.82	.02	-.43	.48	.34
Perceived Helpfulness	.91	.84	.02	-.07	-.56	-.29
Perceived Apprehensiveness	.92	.85	.01	-.14	-.30	-.20

Multiple R	.92	Adjusted R Square	.63
R Square	.85	Standard Error	.31

*Note: Mean scores were used for the perceptual variables in this analysis. These results must be interpreted cautiously because of the small sample size.

The adjusted R-square of .63 indicates the percentage of variance accounted for by this solution when correction is made for small sample size. The bulk of the variance, as the table indicates, is accounted for by number of questions and percentage of talk per dyad. Males talked a greater percentage of the time than females while females asked a greater percenatge of questions in each dyad. The correlation between sex and questions was -.48 ($p < .05$), while the correlation between sex and percentage of time talked per dyad was .80 ($p < .001$). No significant correlation between sex and perceived dominance was uncovered in the analysis ($r=.19$). The percentage of talk per dyad also was not found to be correlated significantly with perception of dominance ($r=.20$), although the simple correlations showed the average length of talk was correlated significantly with perceived dominance ($r=.65$, $p < .01$). Percenatage of questions was correlated significantly with dominance ($r=.54$, $p < .02$). A negative correlation ($r=-.33$) was found between percentage of questions per dyad and percentage of talk per dyad, but this relationship was not found to be statistically significant.

These results have important implications, we think, for the study of sex differences in communication. While the percentage of time talked per dyad was found to be significantly related to sex, the average length of talk was not found to be significantly correlated with sex ($r=.33$). The percentage of time talked per dyad was not found to be

related significantly to perceived dominance, but the average length of talk was correlated significantly with dominance. This finding calls into question the frequent inference that when males talk a greater percentage of the time than females they are engaging in dominant behavior.[33] Our research suggests that the average length of talk per utterance is a better indicator of perceived dominance than percentage of time talked. We found no significant relationship between average length of talk per utterance and sex. Since we also found no significant relationship between sex and perceived dominance we suggest that stereotypes of the "submissive" female and the "aggressive" male may not hold in intercultural interactions. Even though males talked a greater percentage of the time than females, they were not found significantly more likely to be perceived as dominant.[34]

Another analysis of the data on perception of dominance[35] did show that female raters perceived subjects as significantly more dominant than males perceived them. This result, we believe, is consistent with a recent study[36] which found that females judged communicators using "expert" strategies as significantly more dominant than communicators using "ingratiating" strategies (there were no significant differences in males' judgments on dominance and the use of strategies in that study). In the relatively formal intercultural setting we provided, communicators may have utilized more "expert" styles of communicating than would ordinarily occur in

informal conversational interaction. As a result, female raters might have been expected to rate subjects as more dominant than males rated them. This hypothesis should be tested in subsequent research. In the same analysis, we also found that females perceived subjects in this context as significantly more helpful than males perceived them.

Conclusions

Our main conclusion from this work is that the study of differences in female and male communication patterns must be considered as more than a mere fetish of a small group of scholars and more than a passing fad associated with an increase of female scholars in academia. Our research suggests that males and females utilize discourse strategies in different ways and such differences may have profound implications for the study of communicative abilities of all normal humans. Specifically, we suggest that our research: 1) calls into question some prior interpretations of findings from the study of discourse analysis of male/female speech; and 2) replicates some prior research findings in the study of male/female speech. Our research calls previous interpretations of research findings into question in part by suggesting that in some communication situations certain conversational techniques (use of tag questions, interruptions and talkovers) do not occur frequently. The paucity of interruptions indicates

that in certain circumstances even males have the capacity to communicate appropriately. The absence of tag questions in our study suggests that in certain situations females may not be constrained to consistently qualify their assertions. More importantly, our findings on the use of questions, average length of talk per utterance, percentage of talk per dyad, and perceived dominance indicate that previous conceptions of submissive female discourse and dominant male discourse may be oversimplified. It may well be that females and males simply use different styles of conversational control in different contexts. Further, we suggest that the best indicators of conversational control may be both use of questions (relied on more frequently by females) and average length of talk per utterance. Out findings replicate previous work in that this research indicates, in intercultural encounters, Chinese and American females talk less and ask more questions than male counterparts of the same culture. We believe this finding is more than coincidental since males in both cultures maintain higher positions in terms of status and social power than females do. But to conclude that females in these cultures have lower status and social power they therefore engage in behaviors resulting in the relinquishment of interpersonal influence[37] would amount to circular reasoning and premature hypothesizing. In Dating and Mate-Selection in Modern Taiwan,[38] Schak argues that Chinese females actually exert greater control over dating processes than Chinese males exert.

Chinese males may be more aggressive and may take more risks than their female counterparts but Chinese families have power to refuse and embarrass, a power not taken lightly in Chinese culture.[39] An alternative interpretation of this research is that people of both cultures are "rhetorically sensitive"[40] in that they adapt their discourse to situational constraints. Females, having less social status and less social power in both cultures, may adapt to these circumstances by utilizing subtle means of conversational control such as question-asking while males may have social license to talk more and, in some circumstances, to blatantly disregard communication norms by interrupting their partners. The main implication of this interpretation is that the communicative behaviors of females may represent more subtle and complex behaviors than those of males. If this is the case, the analysis of female discourse behaviors vis-a-vis males may be crucial in developing a better understanding of communicative performance and perhaps ultimately a more complete understanding of communicative competence.

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[16] See, for example, Maryann Hartmann, "A Descriptive Study of Language of Men and Women Born in Maine Around 1900 as it Reflects the Lakoff Hypothesis in 'Language and Women's Place,'" Papers in Southwest English IV: Proceedings of the Conference on the Sociology of the Languages of American Women

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[18] John A. Courtwright, Frank E. Miller, and L. Edna Rogers-Miller, "Domineeringness and Dominance: Replication and Expansion," Communication Monographs 46 (1976), 79-92.

[19] Eakins and Eakins.

[20] Because of audio-interference only questions and interruptions could be categorized from these two tapes. Amount of time talked was assessed for one of these tapes.

[21] The two tapes composed of Mexican and American dyads were collected as part of the project in which this research was conducted. Since only two Mexicans, both females, attended the classes from which we drew subjects, there was not a large enough number to warrant complete analysis. However, the tapes were content-analyzed for number of questions and interruptions.

[22] A talk-over is an instance of simultaneous speech.

[23] In this report we limit our discussion to informative questions only. Other types of interrogatives such as questions for clarification ans statements which function as interrogatives

were considered in more detail in a research report under review.

[24] Further analysis of the data as reported in a research manuscript under review indicates that percentage of questions per dyad was related highly to linguistic skill and perceived dominance.

[25] Source for further information will be cited after review.

[26] The greater linguistic skill of females compared to males, as often observed on sex differences, may be a result of the need females have to use more subtle linguistic devices to manage interpersonal encounters. Both linguistic skill and social motivation may help to account for the larger proportion of questions by females than be males in mixed sex dyads.

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[28] Eakins and Eakins, p. 24.

[29] Eakins and Eakins, p. 72-73.

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[31] For a discussion of differences between initial and intimate interaction see Irwin Altman and Dalmas A. Taylor, Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1973).

[32] It is worth noting that when a seperate analysis was conducted using culture as a predictor variable, 95.5 percent of the variance was accounted for. Culture then seems to be a better predictor of message characteristics and receiver perceptions than sex. Analyses for culture are provided in more detail in a research report under review.

[33] See, for example, Mary Brown Parlee, "Conversational Politics," Psychology Today (May, 1979), 48-56.

[34] Research report under review.

[35] Research report under review.

[36] See Bradac, Schneider, Hemphill and Tardy.

[37] The article by Parlee exemplifies this kind of thinking.

[38] David Schak, Dating and Mate-Selection in Modern Taiwan (Taipei, Taiwan: The Orient Cultural Service, 1975).

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